

GAIUS CALIGULA 4TH ROMAN EMPEROR 37-41 A.D.



Gaius Julius Caesar Germanicus, the youth who became Caligula Caesar, fourth of the Roman Emperors, began his reign benignly in 37 A.D. when he was 25 years old. "Caligula" was born on August 31, 12 A.D. He grew up among troops and wore the miniature uniform of a private soldier, including the "half-boots" or "caligae," hence his nickname of "Little Boots" or "Caligula."

When summoned to Capri in 31 A.D., Caligula discovered he was one of two candidates to inherit Tiberius' empire; there also existed a direct descendant of Tiberius, a grandson named Gemellus, then still a child.

Tiberius died six years later. Some accounts say Caligula had him poisoned and, as he lay dying, tried forcibly to remove the imperial signet ring. When unable to do so, he had the feeble old man smothered with a pillow. His accomplice may have been Macro, Commander of the Praetorian Guard, whose wife, Ennia, had been seduced by Caligula, who swore to marry her if he became Emperor. Upon Tiberius' death, the Senate immediately and unanimously conferred absolute power on Caligula.

The 25-year-old Emperor Caligula's good works are few: he completed certain projects neglected by Tiberius, among them the temple of Augustus and Pompeii's theater. He began construction of an aqueduct later finished by Claudius. He rebuilt the walls and temples of Syracuse, restored a palace in Samos, completed the temple of Apollo at Ephesus and had a city built high in the Alps. Some 8,100 years before it became a reality, he sent surveyors to investigate the possibility of cutting a canal through the isthmus of Corinth.

But then the monster in him was awakened. The man whose lust for absolute power had been aroused by Tiberius became almost overnight a creature horrendously evil and cruel. He had Tiberius' grandson killed without warning, on the pretext that the boy had insulted him by taking an antidote against poison. He took as his mistress Caesonia, a woman who had three daughters by a former husband and who was recklessly extravagant and utterly

promiscuous. Although Caligula loved her passionately, he would not allow her the dignified title of wife until she had borne him a child, whereupon he announced the marriage and the birth of his daughter Julia simultaneously.

The unexplained death of his favorite sister, Drusilla (with whom he had an affair), undoubtedly contributed to what today would be diagnosed as a nervous breakdown. The most common cause for her death is now believed to be a failed attempt at a cesarean section performed by Caligula himself to retrieve a child they conceived together. He made it a capital offense to laugh, bathe or dine with one's parents, wife or children during the period of public mourning. Grief-crazed, he fled Rome one night and upon his return shortly thereafter, Caligula proclaimed himself a god and had a temple erected to himself. Soon after he began his reign, Caligula had depleted Tiberius' entire treasury of 27 million gold pieces.

His insane acts included bestowing a consulship upon his horse, sending poisoned sweetmeats to friends who had named him their sole heir and opening a brothel in the Imperial Palace stocked with young boys and the wives of his senators.

At noon on January 24, 41 A.D., while he and Caesonia were attending a theatrical performance in which they were to take some part, Caligula was killed by two members of his guards. To ensure that no direct descendant would succeed him, Caesonia was included in the slaughter and the brains of the child Julia were bashed out.

The terror inspired by his short reign can best be judged by public reaction; the citizenry at first was reluctant to believe that Caligula had been assassinated, suspecting instead that he had invented the story in order to discover what people thought of him.